

DECLARATION

I declare that, apart from the assistance acknowledged, this report, titled:

“A case study of South Africa’s teachers’ understandings of the nature of science and classroom instructional practices” is my own work. All sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete citation and referencing. This report is being submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Science Education. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

N.J. BEAUCHAMP

DATE

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May God bless everyone who was involved in this study!

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Zwelibanzi; for his unwavering support and encouragement throughout the writing of this report and to my beloved daughters Yolisa, Lusanda and Nikiwe, for their understanding and Ousi, for her support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of figures	viii
List of tables	ix
List of acronyms	x
List of appendices	xi
Abstract	xii

CHAPTER 1: Introduction into the study

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background and rationale	2
1.2 The purpose of the study	3
1.3 Research questions	3
1.4 Theoretical framework	4
1.5 Research methodology outline	5
1.6 Chapters outline	5
1.7 Conclusion	6

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2. Introduction	7
2.1 The Nature of Science	7
2.1.1 What is the Nature of Science?	7
2.1.2 Some basic tenets of the NOS	8
2.1.2.1 The theory-laden nature of scientific knowledge	9
2.1.2.2 Scientific knowledge is tentative	9
2.1.2.3 The creative and imaginative nature of scientific knowledge	10
2.1.2.4 Social and cultural embeddedness of scientific knowledge ...	10
2.1.2.5 There is no ONE scientific method	11
2.1.2.6 The relationship between scientific theories and laws	11
2.2 Instructional practice	12
2.3 Theoretical framework	12
2.3.1 Categorizing teachers' NOS understandings	12
2.3.2 Teaching about NOS	13
2.3.3 Teaching practices	15
2.4 Literature review	15
2.4.1 Studies done on teachers' understandings of NOS	16
2.4.2 Studies done on teaching about NOS	17
2.4.3 Studies done on teachers' understandings of NOS and instructional practices	19
2.5 Conclusion	19

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

3. Introduction	20
3.1 The research design	20
3.2 Methodological approaches to studying NOS and instructional practices.....	21
3.2.1 Methods used to study teachers' NOS understandings	21
3.2.2 Methods used to study teachers' instructional practices	22
3.3 Sampling and participants	23
3.4 Data collection	24
3.4.1 Teachers' NOS understandings	24
3.4.2 Classroom instructional practices	25
3.4.2.1 Classroom observations	25
3.4.2.2 Interviews	26
3.5 Data analysis	27
3.5.1 Data from the interviews	27
3.5.2 Data from classroom observations	28
3.6 Issues of validity and reliability	28
3.7 Ethical issues	29
3.8 Conclusion	30

CHAPTER 4: Results and Discussion

4. Introduction	31
4.1 Teachers' understandings about the nature of science	31

4.1.1 Teachers' understandings about what science is	33
4.1.2 Teachers' understandings about the role and purpose of experiments in science.....	35
4.1.3 The relationship between theories and laws and their roles in science.....	37
4.1.4 Resolving scientific disputes	39
4.2 Teaching about NOS.....	41
4.2.1 Results from interviews	42
4.2.1.1 The teachers' teaching philosophy.....	42
4.2.1.2 Teaching NOS aspects.....	43
4.2.1.3 Planning for LO3 achievement.....	44
4.2.2 Results from classroom observations	45
4.3 The nature of interactions between teachers' NOS understandings and their instructional practices	46
4.3.1 The teachers' classroom practices: results from lesson observations..	46
4.3.2 The post-classroom observation interviews	50
4.4 Conclusion	51

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

5. Introduction	52
5.1 Teachers' understandings about NOS	52
5.2 Teaching about NOS.....	54
5.3 The interactions between NOS understandings and practices	55
5.4 Implications and recommendations	55
5.5 Limitations of the study	56
5.6 Conclusion	57

REFERENCES	58
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APPENDICES	65
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	A summary of study's methodological design	21
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Teachers' understandings on selected NOS aspects	32
Table 4.2 Summary of the main ideas about how the teachers teach about NOS	41
Table 4.3 Results of the classroom observation for each teacher	48

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THE STUDY

LO - Learning outcome

NCS - National Curriculum Statements

NOS - Nature of Science

NOSS - Nature of Science Scale

OBE - Outcomes Based Education

TOUS - Test on Understanding Science

VNOS - Views of Nature of Science

WISP - Wisconsin Inventory of Science Processes

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Teacher Interview Schedule	65
Appendix B	Subject Information Sheet	67
Appendix C	Example of lesson observation notes summary.....	68
Appendix D	Example of teacher interview transcript.....	69
Appendix E	Letter to the principal	77

A case study of South Africa teachers' understandings of the nature of science and classroom instructional practices

Julia Beauchamp

ABSTRACT

This study investigated South Africa's secondary school teachers' understandings of the nature of science (NOS) in relation to their instructional practices. The participants were three Grade 10 Physical Science teachers conveniently selected from three schools in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Teacher understandings of the nature of science were elicited through semi-structured interviews. The core questions for the interviews were adapted from the Views of Nature of Science Questionnaire (VNOS) – Form C developed by Abd-El-Khalick, Lederman, Bell and Schwartz (2002). The nature of science tenets explored were: what is science?: the role and purpose of experiments in science: the difference between scientific theories and laws in science and how scientists settle scientific disputes. Teacher instructional practices were ascertained through semi-structured interviews and lesson observations. The results were analyzed using a combination of typological analysis and interpretive analysis. These results show that on the selected NOS tenets, the sampled teachers hold a mixture of naïve and sophisticated understandings. These understandings are, however, largely naïve. It was found that the teachers only teach about NOS implicitly. None of the teachers was found to explicitly teach about the NOS. It also came out that the teachers were experiencing difficulties in both interpreting and implementation of Learning Outcome 3 of South Africa's new science curriculum. It is concluded that the interaction between teachers' NOS understandings and their instructional practices occurs without the teachers being aware of it, i.e. unconsciously. Recommendations for teaching, curriculum implementation and future research are suggested.

Key words

nature of science, instructional practices, teachers, scientific literacy, positivism, constructivism, curriculum, learning outcomes